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AUTHOR	Grogan, Margaret
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ABSTRACT

Few superintendents of K-12 public school districts in the United States are women, though many women have leadership positions in schools. This book presents findings of a study that explored what it was like to be a qualified woman aspiring to the superintendency. Data were obtained from interviews with 27 self-identified women aspirants who lived in a northwestern state characterized by a relatively homogeneous population. The participants were highly capable administrators with clear visions of education, had spent over 20 years in education, and modeled commitment to the success of all children. The first chapter provides an overall context for the study of the superintendent. Chapter 2 elaborates feminist poststructuralism, the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 3 discusses what it means to be qualified for the superintendency, incorporating the beliefs of participants and of those within the dominant discourse. Data from the interviews are analyzed in chapters 4 through 6. Chapter 4 looks at how the women administrators operated within the working context of educational administration; how personal contexts influenced the lives of women aspiring to be superintendents is the focus of chapter 5. The sixth chapter describes the approaches to leadership that the women had developed, with a focus on the relational aspects of administration. The seventh chapter explores the evolution of leadership behaviors and attitudes from a feminist perspective. The final chapter presents conclusions and discusses some implications for reformed practices within educational administration to provide for a more equitable distribution of future superintendencies. The findings: (1) confirmed some alternative approaches to leadership; (2) revealed the white, gendered nature of K-12 administration; (3) identified gender as a factor in a woman's preparation for the superintendency; (4) identified a variety of individual responses to barriers to the superintendency; and (5) describe how the women resisted discouragement. Appendices contain a description of the research design and methodology and sample interview questions. (Contains 129 references.) (LMI)